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MAR 16 1931

Tuesday, March 17, 1931.

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Housekeepers' Chat

NOT FOR PUBLICATION

Subject: "Ironing Is An Art." Information approved by the Bureau of Home Economics, U.S.D.A.

Bulletin available: "Methods and Equipment for Home Laundering."

Polly Perkins was in the midst of what she called a "stew" when I dropped in for a visit. Instead of offering me a hearty greeting at the door as she usually does, she sighed and then said, "Oh, dear me. Why pick this of all days to come to see me?"

"Beg pardon, shall I leave?"

"Oh, no. Please don't leave. The very idea. Take off your coat and sit right down here. Really, though, you have no idea how I hate to see visitors on Tuesday. Blue Monday, Aunt Sammy, is nothing in my life compared to black Tuesday - ironing day. By this time in the afternoon I've ruined my disposition and lost my manners. Some day I'll be so rude on a Tuesday afternoon that my friends will leave me and never come back. But I'm so glad you're here. I need some sympathetic person to sputter to about my troubles."

"Troubles? Anyone with a pleasant, convenient, attractive -- I might even say elegant - laundry like this talking about troubles? Why, if some kind person would provide me with this perfect little first-floor laundry to work in, I think I'd be content to iron shirts day in and day out."

"That's all very well for you to say, Aunt Sammy, but if you had ever experienced the disasters in ironing that I've gone through today - well" -- Polly sighed again.

"Every week it is the same story with me about this ironing. Here's a scorch in the front of Bob's best shirt. Wait until he sees that! And here's a luncheon cloth I've worked and worked on but the wrinkles just won't come out. It's very heavy linen and somehow I never can iron it to suit Mother. These napkins I sprinkled myself this morning but I suppose I dampened them too much. Anyway they seem too wet to iron successfully. So it goes. Really, it's a good thing I'm preparing to be a school teacher when I graduate. If I had to work in a laundry for my living, I'm afraid I'd just give up and starve. Ironing is such a chore. Mother is always saying that practice makes perfect. But I don't seem to improve a bit."



For the sake of the Pollys in the world, let me say that ironing like many other household jobs, can be interesting and pleasant -- or unsuccessful and difficult. You can make an art of it, or you can make it drudgery, all depending on how you go at it. If you have the same troubles every Tuesday, as Polly says she does, why not discover the causes and try to remedy them? Perhaps it's your ironing board. Or perhaps it's the way you sprinkle your clothes so that they are too damp or too dry or so that the moisture is not evenly distributed. Or perhaps it's the temperature of your iron -- too hot or too cool for the purpose. All these points are worth considering for success in ironing. All these and the skill that comes from experience.

If you want to make an art of this job, if you are interested in the fine details that make for perfection and the efficient and easy ways of a professional, I suggest that you visit a commercial laundry some day soon. Make a tour through the whole establishment and, as you go, notice just how the various ironing jobs are being done. It's an education in itself and you'll be surprised how many tricks of the trade can be applied to your ironing at home.

Your ironing board makes a good deal of difference in results. It should be of the right height to prevent bending and stooping. The best work can never be done under the strain of a bent back and an uncomfortable position generally. The board should be sturdy, firm and rigid, and it should be heavily and firmly padded. Padding is more important than many housekeepers realize. A very thin undercover makes it difficult and sometimes almost impossible to iron out wrinkles that will disappear easily if the padding is firm, perfectly smooth yet resilient. Several layers of old blankets or heavy silence cloth stretched smooth and taut over the board make excellent padding. As each layer goes on, iron over it to prevent wrinkles and to make it absolutely smooth. Thumb tacks are convenient to fasten the padding as it is stretched on the board. Later upholstery tacks may be used, or tapes to tie on the cover. For the cover heavy sheeting or unbleached muslin are good materials. Embroidered pieces need even thicker, more cushiony padding to make the embroidery stand out. Iron such pieces right side down on several thicknesses of Turkish toweling.

Sprinkling the clothes? Grandmother did it by hand, and, with so many years' experience, she was very skillful at it. There are many sprinkling devices on the market today that distribute the moisture more evenly than the hand method. A Clean whisk broom dipped in water makes a handy sprinkler. There are also metal perforated tops to plug in bottles for sprinkling.

Right here, I'd better pause and say that when I speak of sprinkling clothes I mean only cottons and linens. Silks, rayons and wools are never treated this way before ironing. Silks and other delicate fabrics are washed and rolled up tightly in two Turkish towels, which act as blotters to absorb the moisture. Then they are shaken out lightly until dry enough to iron. Silks are ironed on the wrong side. Yes, ironed while still damp with a warm but never a hot iron. Too much dampness or a little too much heat in the iron makes the silk papery.



But I've wandered from my subject. I was talking about sprinkling cottons and linens. The object of this process, of course, is to make the clothes evenly dampened but never wet. After the water is sprinkled on, rolling them up and allowing them to stand, gives the dampness a chance to penetrate all parts of the fabric uniformly. Lay the pieces straight and smooth and sprinkle them as evenly as possible. Flat pieces like napkins and handkerchiefs should be laid with the same side up and with the hems in the same position for convenience in handling them at ironing time. After you have dampened the pieces, roll them up in tight smooth rolls, pack them in a basket or some clean container where they will be protected from soil, and cover them with a clean cloth. In warm weather be careful not to leave the clothes rolled up long enough to mildew. One more hint - if the clothes must be ironed soon, sprinkle them with warm rather than cold water, since warm water penetrates the material more quickly.

Now about the iron. I hardly need to mention that every well-cared-for iron is dusted with a clean cloth always before use, and that any starch or other material that may stick to it, is rubbed off with oil or paraffin. No scraping which may leave scratches in the surface.

As I said, correct temperature in the iron has a lot to do with good results. Every housekeeper using a hand iron needs to experiment to find out the correct temperature for her own use. It is an individual matter, you see, for a slow ironer needs a lower temperature and a fast ironer a higher temperature. Then, the heat must be adjusted for the fabric also. Wools, some silks and some rayons scorch more easily, and therefore require a lower temperature, than cottons and linens. There is still another thing to consider. That is moisture. The temperature that the garment will stand varies according to its dampness. For a very heavy fabric, use lower heat. Otherwise the surface of the fabric may scorch before the inside is dry.

Probably you have all seen or heard of these new heat-controlled electric irons, equipped with regulators that may be set at the temperature needed. If properly set, such an iron should prevent scorching as well as the bother of turning the current on and off to regulate the heat. As a safety device it is also useful since the automatic control reduces the danger from fire. Irons equipped with many settings for temperature, instead of a few, are especially convenient, because they may be adjusted to individual needs.

Before we stop, let's discuss ironing machines for a minute. Many women nowadays send the household washing to the laundry, have it returned rough dried, and do their own ironing. An ironing machine is a real labor-saver wherever there is a great deal of ironing to be done. Instead of standing up and going over miles of flat surface with a hand iron, the housewife can sit at the machine and simply guide the pieces as they pass through it. Difficult parts of garments may be touched up with a hand iron afterward.

If you are planning to buy an ironing machine, take some half days off and watch a trained operator or demonstrator at work. This is an excellent way to learn how to use the machine on different kinds of garments. When it comes to selecting your machine, think of your own needs in size, price and appearance. For long service, it will pay to choose a machine with a well-supported



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roll which will not sag at either end, even with long use. Poor support means that the padded roll, that acts as the ironing board, and the heated shoe, that acts as the iron, may get out of alinement and spoil the contact between the two.

A clean cover on the roll is very important, for garments may be stained by scorch on the cover or by deposits of soap or fatty acids left there by clothes that have not been properly rinsed. For best results never allow the padding to become worn or flabby since this will cause uneven pull and poor ironing. Change the padding often, especially when it has pressed down by absorbing moisture and has lost its spring. There are many kinds of padding available -- felt, wool and cotton knit. For an extra smooth finish, double faced cotton felt over other padding gives good results. Certain companies manufacture paddings that have been pre-shrunk.

Tomorrow: "Why Tantrums?"

